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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MICHIGAN'S BOUNDARIES: A STUDY IN HISTOR- ICAL GEOGRAPHY

BY

GEORGE J. MILLER

A study of the boundaries of most States would reveal many interesting problems in historical geography. In some cases a misconception of the geography of a region led to the confirmation of odd boundaries. In other cases the natural boundary was disregarded. The position of Michigan among the Great Lakes and the importance of lake frontage to adjoining States made the establishment of its boundaries a national affair. They represent a compromise and created in Michigan two economic units having very unlike interests.

TERRITORY OF MICHIGAN ESTABLISHED

By the treaty of Paris in 1783 the United States obtained title to that portion of the Great Lakes region lying south of the Canadian boundary, though it was occupied by the British until 1796. A number of Eastern States promptly advanced claims to large parts of the territory. Yielding to public opinion, however, they soon surrendered these claims to the Confederation, and in 1787 all the land north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi was organized as the Northwest Territory. Article 5 of the ordinance provided that "there shall be formed in the said territory not less than three nor more than five States," and defined the boundaries of the three proposed States. The same article provided that "the boundaries of these three States shall be subject so far to be altered, that, if Congress shall hereafter find it expedient, they shall have authority to form one or two States in that part of the said territory which lies north of an east and west line drawn through the southerly bend of Lake Michigan." When any of the said States should be established, the northern boundaries of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were to be definitely marked according to the terms of the ordinance.

By an Act of Congress in 1805 the territory of Michigan was defined more definitely on the west by "a line drawn from the said southerly bend (of Lake Michigan) through the middle of said lake to its northern extremity (Fig. 1), and thence due north to the northern boundary of the United States."* The southern boundary remained as defined in the ordinance, and the Territorial Government was established with these as boundaries.

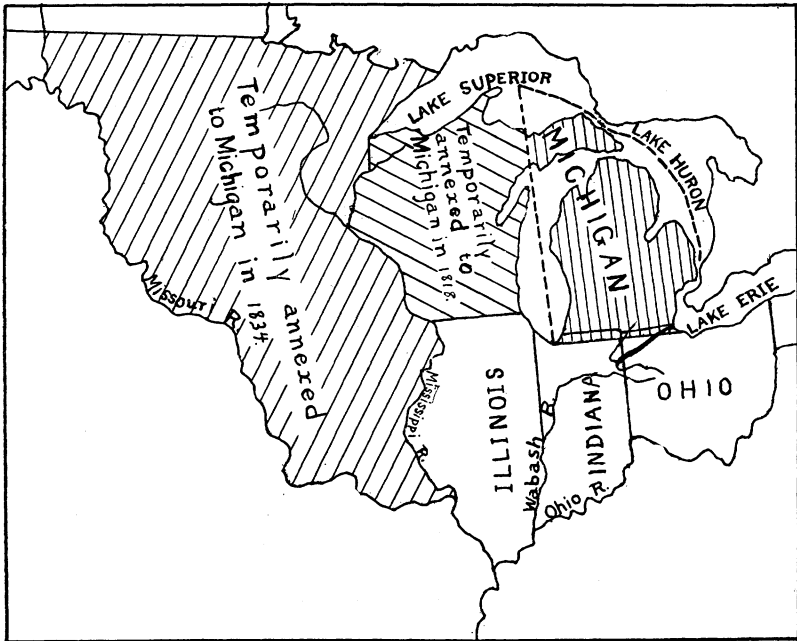


FIG. 1.—Territory over which the jurisdiction of Michigan has extended—1805, 1818, 1834.
Mich. Pioneer and Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. 27, p. 348.

OHIO AND INDIANA SOUGHT MICHIGAN TERRITORY TO GAIN LAKE PORTS

Michigan's history within definite limits begins here. The territory soon was involved in a serious struggle to maintain the integrity of its domain, as both Indiana and Ohio sought valuable portions. The division of the territory was based on Mitchell's map of 1775 (Fig. 2), which set forth the best-known information of the geography of the region. According to this map, a due east and west line through the southern bend of Lake Michigan intersected the in-

* Sen. Doc. 211, p. 20, 24th Cong., 1st. Sess., Vol. 3.

ternational line north of Lake Erie, giving the ports of that lake to the area which became Ohio, and deprived both Indiana and Illinois of a lake port. A later map of the region (Fig. 3) brought out the fact that Toledo and Monroe Harbors belonged to Michigan.

The Harbor of Monroe was of small importance compared with that of Toledo, and Ohio people supposed that the latter fell within

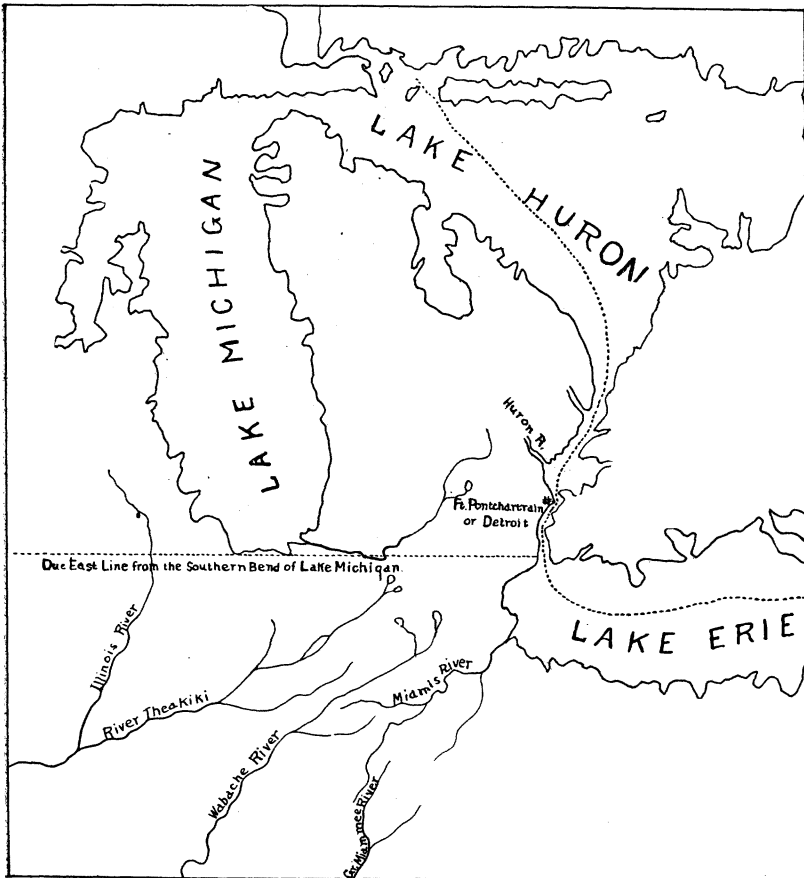


FIG. 2—Mitchell's Map of 1755. Sen. Doc. 211, p. 16, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. 3.

their limits. This was reported not to be the case when the convention was in session to form their State constitution.* Realizing that they would lose practically their entire lake front if the southern bend of Lake Michigan lay as far south as reported, they inserted a

* Historical Transactions of Ohio, Vol. 1, pp. 77, 116.

clause in their constitution defining their northern boundary as a line running from the southern bend of Lake Michigan to the northern point of Maumee Bay* (Fig. 3). This was to be the boundary if the report was true, and Congress assented. Congress accepted the constitution proposed for Ohio, and admitted the State to the Union, but did not give its formal consent to the boundary.† Ohio, however, claimed the area thus shorn from Michigan and attempted to govern it.

When Indiana presented itself for admission, Congress consented to the shifting of Michigan's southern boundary ten miles north of the southern bend of the lake,‡ thus taking from it another port and giving it to Indiana. This port was of vital importance to Indiana as it afforded water transportation at the north in addition to its facilities at the south.

Michigan gave little attention at the time to the Indiana matter other than to protest the precedent,§ as the area was unsettled. Such was not the condition, however, in the southeast about Toledo. The active settlement of Michigan began from the vicinity of Maumee Bay and Detroit, and nearly all the population was still in that quarter. The leading commercial interests of the territory centered there, and when Ohio asked for admission, Wayne County, which then included all the southeastern part of the State, protested vigorously against being left out. They felt that their business interests would be served better by the State government, than they could be if left within a territory.|| The leading men of Michigan, however, had its future somewhat planned, and fortunately their counsel prevailed in Congress, and Wayne County remained a part of the territory.

Michigan had commercial interests at stake. A railroad had been started which was to terminate at Toledo, and to transfer this port to another State was to Michigan unreasonable and illegal. The men most interested aroused the spirit of State patriotism until the people were ready to fight for the strip which had, thus far, belonged to them.

Ohio claimed that Toledo was the "key" to the west and must

* Constitution of Ohio, Article 7, Sec. 6.

† *Sen. Doc.* 354, pp. 13-18, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. 4.

‡ *State Papers*, No. 3, p. 30, 14th Cong., 2nd Sess.

Sen. Jour. 14th Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 27-28.

§ *Memorial* of the Governor and Judges, 1818, Archives of State Dept., of Mich. Cited by A. M. Soule: *Pub. Mich. Pioneer and Hist. Soc.*, Vol. 27, p. 342.

Sen. Jour., 15th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 180.

|| *Statutes of Ohio*, Vol. 3, p. 2096.

St. Clair Papers, Vol. I, pp. 228-229; Vol. II, pp. 543-580.

Burnet: *Notes on the Early Settlement of the Northwest Territory*, pp. 337-494.

be included within its boundaries. This, of course, was an equally strong reason why Michigan should not surrender it. Congress had for years given aid to internal improvements in Ohio. One of the greatest of these projects was the Wabash and Erie Canal (Fig. 3).

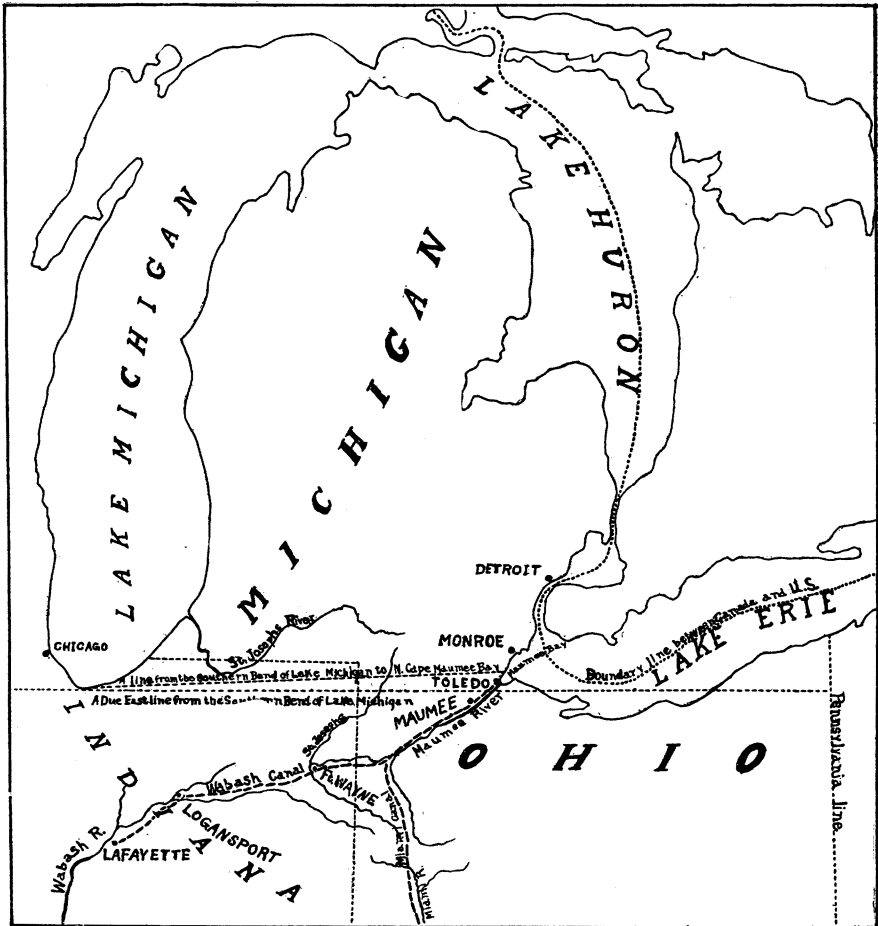


FIG. 3—Relative position of Lake Erie and Michigan. From Sen. Doc. 211, p. 16, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. 3.

It was now pointed out that this canal would terminate in Michigan unless the claims of Ohio were maintained.

The importance of Toledo in the minds of the business men of the day may be summarized as follows: (1) It had a good harbor. The estuary of the Maumee River formed a harbor that, for the relatively small boats of the day, was thirteen miles long and had

a navigable channel about 100 rods in width.* (2) It was held to be the nearest port for an area as large as Massachusetts and Connecticut combined, and with more than double their producing capacity of food and raw materials.† (3) Most of the people of Michigan and of Upper Canada passed through it in their intercourse with Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.‡ (4) It was nearer than any other town on Lake Erie to the gathering point of north-western commerce—the southern bend of Lake Michigan.§ (5) It was nearer than any other lake town to Cincinnati the chief city of the Ohio valley.¶ (6) A proposed canal system was to center at Toledo. This system was to be 663 miles long and to pass through a rich region.‡ (7) It would be an important distributing point for the manufactures of the East and Europe. The canals would give it a hinterland of 100,000 square miles.§ (8) Water power would be supplied from the canals, and coal could be obtained cheaply.||

TOLEDO HARBOR, STATEHOOD, AND NATIONAL POLITICS

Michigan asked admission in 1833 with the original boundaries (1805) of the territory. But the settlement of the northern boundary of Ohio and Michigan's admission were inseparable questions, and statehood was denied. When the second attempt to gain statehood failed, Michigan decided to form a constitution and State government without permission. This was done in 1835 along the lines of the Ordinance of 1787 and Michigan actually exercised for about two years, until admitted, all the prerogatives of a State.** During that time the dispute with Ohio waxed warm, both sides being thoroughly determined to gain their point. Michigan exercised jurisdiction over the disputed tract, while Ohio pressed its claims. Troops were sent to the scene by both sides and a disastrous border war was narrowly averted.

Justice and precedent appeared to favor Michigan, but expediency lay on the other side. The ownership of the Lake Erie port now affected national politics and finally was settled on the floor of Congress. Three States and a Territory were drawn into the struggle. By the opinion of the attorney general it was the duty of the President to support Michigan at all hazards, but the latter's in-

* *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, Vol. 9, p. 42.

† *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, Vol. 17, p. 490.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ *Ibid.*, Fol. 9, p. 46.

¶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

** T. M. Cooley: *Michigan*, pp. 219-220.

terests were on the side of Ohio.* A presidential election was at hand and to support Michigan was to lose Ohio to his party. As a great State it might hold the balance of power in the election. Michigan was democratic and would strengthen the President's party. But Indiana and Illinois, both of which had secured their boundaries in violation of the Ordinance of 1787, were interested adversely to its boundary claims.* Here were three States with votes in the Electoral College on one side, and a non-voting Territory on the other. They would probably be alienated if the President decided against them. If Michigan were admitted before election its votes could not equal those of the three opposing States.* Well might John Quincy Adams say: "Never in the course of my life have I known a controversy of which all the right was so clear on one side and all the power so overwhelmingly on the other, never a case where the temptation was so intense to take the strongest side and the duty of taking the weakest was so thankless."†

Political interests finally prevailed and, as a compromise, the Upper Peninsula and Statehood were offered to Michigan if it would accept the present northern boundary of Ohio. A convention for this purpose was called at Ann Arbor in September, 1836. In the meantime considerable sentiment in favor of acceptance had arisen in the more densely settled and commercial southeastern part of Michigan. It was here that industries, agriculture, shipping interests and financial enterprise were feeling the need of a stable state government even if a valuable harbor must be forfeited. It was the same spirit that desired to give Wayne County to Ohio when the latter State was admitted. It is also probable that the proposed plan of distributing the surplus public money had much to do in determining the attitude of the financiers. But, in general, the frontier population was as determined as ever to fight against an infringement of its rights. Practically all the newspapers of the frontier counties earnestly opposed the surrender of Toledo Harbor and the narrow strip of territory involved.‡ To them it was a matter of justice and right. Their counsel dominated the convention and the proposal of Congress was rejected, thus leaving the controversy as far as ever from settlement.§

But the presidential election was drawing nearer and there was an increasing desire to take part in it. There was also a growing sentiment that nothing could be gained by delay. Accordingly an-

* W. Buel: *Mag. Western Hist.*, Vol. III, p. 457.

† Cited by Cooley: *Michigan*, p. 219.

‡ A. M. Soule: *Pub. Mich. Pioneer and Hist. Soc.*, Vol. 27, p. 370.

§ *Journal of the Convention*, pp. 19-27 *et seq.*

north from the southern bend of Lake Michigan to the Canadian line (Fig. 1). In 1818, all the country east of the Mississippi and north of Illinois and Indiana was added for temporary purposes of government. This was a vast area to be governed from Detroit as a center. The distance and the difficulties of travel were so great that it was practically impossible for the representatives of this region to participate in the legislative councils.* The distance likewise made the exercise of government slow, if not impossible.† The region was being settled rapidly, and soon there was complaint of the great evils resulting from so distant a seat of government.

In 1824, the people west of Lake Michigan petitioned Congress for separate organization. They were joined in their petition by the people north of Mackinac Straits,‡ who felt that their interests were tied up with the western people rather than with the people of Lower Michigan. The Straits formed an impassable barrier between the two peninsulas for a part of every year and seemed to alienate them,§ as it still does to a limited extent. With this petition began the struggle for the Upper Peninsula. The statesmen of Michigan were willing, if not desirous of being rid of the western country on account of its distance and the consequent expense of government, but they objected to the loss of the country north of the Straits and petitioned Congress accordingly. Both petitions were referred by that body and nothing more was heard of it for two years. The desires of these western people for separation from a seat of government so far away grew in intensity as time passed, and, in 1826, "the inhabitants of the northwest part of the Territory of Michigan" again asked Congress to separate them from Michigan proper and allow them self government.** Influences were again brought to bear that caused this to fail.

At the session of the Michigan Legislative Council in 1829 a memorial was presented from the discontented upper counties praying to be annexed to the proposed Territory of Wisconsin. The Council accepted this memorial by a vote of seven to six. Wiser counsel soon prevailed and a few days later it was reconsidered, recommitted and not again reported.†† Constant efforts were directed thereafter against the loss of any of the Upper Peninsula. Yet it is interesting to note that the ties binding the upper counties

* Reports of Committees, No. 56, 21st Congress, 1st Sess., Vol. I, pp. 11-12.

† Wis. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. XI, p. 463.

‡ Sen. Jour., 18th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 68.

§ Wis. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. XI, p. 472.

|| Ibid., Vol. IV., p. 353.

** Report of Committees, No. 56, pp. 1-7, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. I.

†† Jour. of Mich. Legislative Council, 1829, p. 81.

to "The Peninsula"* were so weak, and the knowledge of the resources of these counties so slight that even Governor Cass in his message of 1829 said that he was "not aware that" the creation of a new territory "can injuriously affect our interests."† He seems to have changed his mind shortly after, as in his message of two years later he stated that any division of the territory would be "equally injurious to our rights and subversive of our interests."

The people of the upper counties persisted in their efforts for separation, and continued to memorialize Congress. But that body was busy trying to please Ohio and at the same time satisfy Michigan by extending its territory to the northwest in lieu of the Toledo strip. "The Peninsula" was equally energetic in its attempt to secure statehood. The Constitutional Convention of 1835 brought out and emphasized anew the strong feeling in favor of separation still existing among the northern counties. Four members made an earnest effort to insert the proviso in the constitution; "That nothing therein contained shall prevent the Legislature . . . from consenting to any such alteration of the western boundary line of said State by which the islands of Michilimackinac and Bois Blanc and the County of Chippewa may be detached from the State and attached to the district of country lying west of Lake Michigan. . . ."‡

Michigan's leaders gave little attention to the desires of the people at the north. They began to realize that Ohio was going to win, and Lucius Lyon wrote that it had been decided to "go in for all the country Congress will give us west of the lakes,"§ for, "if we lose on the south, and gain nothing on the north and west we shall be poor indeed."|| He knew that the fisheries were excellent, believed the soil fertile, and had great hopes that the copper deposits would prove valuable. We have already seen that his advice and plans were ultimately accepted, but not before the people of the State had made great protest against forcing upon them "barren wastes" in a region of "perpetual snow."

SUPPOSED WATERWAY PROPOSED AS THE WISCONSIN-MICHIGAN BOUNDARY

A continuous waterway was supposed to exist between Green Bay and Lake Superior (Fig. 4), and Representative Preston pro-

* Name applied to Lower Michigan at the time.

† *Jour.* of Mich. Legislative Council, 1829, p. 5.

‡ *Journal* of Constitutional Convention of 1835, pp. 204-205; for names of members pp. 2, 22.

§ Letter of Lucius Lyon to Col. D. Goodwin, Feb. 4, 1836, *Pub. Mich. Pioneer and Hist. Soc.*, Vol. 27, p. 475.

|| Letter of Lyon to Col. Andrew Mack, Feb. 21, 1836, *Pub. Mich. Pioneer and Hist. Soc.*, Vol. 27, p. 479.

posed to Congress that this be taken as the boundary. The proposal was accepted and surveyors sent to mark the line. They were, of course, unable to do this, and reported the same to Congress.

In the meantime, since the proposed line was impossible, the Wisconsin people seized the opportunity to again enter their protest

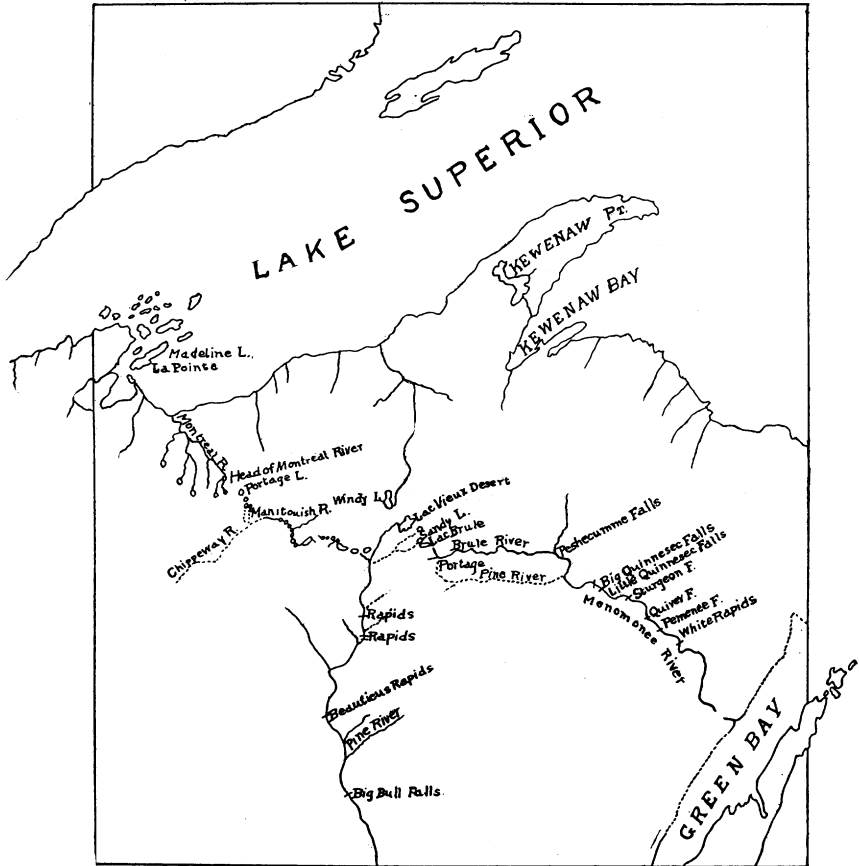


FIG. 5.—Boundary between Michigan and Wisconsin, as corrected by Capt. T. J. Cram, 1842.
From Sen. Doc. 170, p. 12, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. 3.

against the loss of the northern counties.* The petition was buried in committee; and thereby aroused all the strong feelings of state rights within the westerners. State sovereignty was discussed in all its phases and serious trouble seemed imminent.† They did not expect that Michigan would yield territory already given it, even

* *Exc. Doc. 147*, pp. 1-7, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. III.

† *Wis. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, Vol. II, p. 462.

though the people of the northern counties so desired, but demanded that Congress should pay Wisconsin for the country thus taken from it. This demand met the same fate as the others,* but very likely had much to do with future appropriations favorable to the State. So much space is given here to Wisconsin history in order to emphasize the far reaching effects of Michigan's struggles resulting from her geographic location and economic interests.†

Even today Michigan's northwestern boundary is not satisfactory. The Brule and Menominee Rivers were found by the surveyor to contain many islands, while the "main channels" of the streams were difficult to locate.‡ Congress therefore accepted his advice and divided the islands between the two States, giving those above Quinnesec Falls to Michigan, and those below to Wisconsin§ (Fig. 5). This would seem sufficient, but the main channel at Menominee which is the legal boundary line, lies on the Wisconsin side of the islands which the enabling act gave to that State, thus causing Wisconsin to exercise jurisdiction over islands that are in Michigan.

UPPER AND LOWER MICHIGAN NOT GEOGRAPHIC UNITS

The economic interests of the two peninsulas of Michigan are in striking contrast. The dominant industry of the north is iron and copper mining. Lumbering stands second, while agriculture and manufacturing (other than copper smelting) are of relatively small importance. The two peninsulas are separated by the Lake Michigan-Huron waterway, which is blocked by ice for part of the year. Much of their intercourse therefore takes the route through Wisconsin and Chicago. This leads to more economical trade relations with Wisconsin by the people of the north. The great bulk of their lumber and mine products finds markets outside of Michigan, thus offering little inducement for trade between the two sections. The Southern Peninsula is dominantly agricultural and manufacturing. Its lumbering and mineral resources are also of another sort, being soft woods (largely), coal, and salt. The principal outside markets for its products are found to the west, south, and east rather than in the Upper Peninsula. This means that the two sections are not a geographic and economic unit, and it leads to the differentiation of the interests of the people.

The old feeling of attachment in the Upper Peninsula to the

* A. H. Sanford: State Sovereignty in Wisconsin, in *Pub. Am. Hist. Assoc.*, 1891, p. 177 et seq.

† *House Journal*, 28th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 483, 740.

‡ Sen. Doc. 151, pp. 7-9, 26th Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. IV.

§ Statutes at Large, Vol. IX, p. 57.

country at the west, and the lack of strong ties binding it to the Lower Peninsula are still apparent. The separation produced by the lakes has been intensified by the building of interstate railroads. They furnish good communication with Wisconsin and other western States. Here no barrier exists, and the economic and social interests on both sides of the line are identical. The effort to court the favor of the Upper Peninsula has always been a factor in Michigan politics. It was the long established custom of the political parties to give it the office of Lieutenant Governor and the certainty of losing this in case "Primary Reform" was adopted led to much discussion if not to serious opposition to it in that section. As was foreseen its adoption took this office from the Upper Peninsula. A substitute had to be secured in order to avoid serious disaffection, and that substitute was found in the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. This illustrates the human response to geographic and economic environment. The activities of a government may be extended over an area within boundary lines arbitrarily drawn, but the establishment of those lines does not make a united people. Few States of the Union are economic units hence their government is a compromise of diverse interests.

THE HEMPSTEAD PLAINS

A NATURAL PRAIRIE ON LONG ISLAND

BY

ROLAND M. HARPER

It does not seem to be generally known, even to geographers, that there is in the western third of Long Island, within an hour's journey by rail from New York, about fifty square miles of dry land which was treeless when the country was first settled, and that a considerable part of this can still be seen in its natural condition. This prairie, known locally as the "Hempstead Plains," is mentioned in a few historical and descriptive works, but long before geography became a science it had ceased to excite the wonder of the inhabitants and travelers, few of whom at the present time realize that there is not another place exactly like it in the world. Its influence on local geographical nomenclature is shown in the names Plainview, Plain Edge, Island Trees and East Meadow Brook.